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THE WORKS OF THE AMERICAN ETCHERS.

II.—HENRY FARRER.



HENRY FARRER was born in London on the 23d of March, 1843, and came to America when he was nineteen years old. In the earlier part of his artistic career he was for some time an adherent of the so-called pre-Raphaelite school. His first serious attempts at etching were made about 1868, when he succeeded in building a small press, and supplying himself with the materials and tools, all self-made, used in etching. Necessity, however, compelled him to turn his attention to more lucrative pursuits, so that, after he had done a few plates from time to time under most unfavorable conditions, he almost abandoned etching, until the formation of the New York Etching Club, in 1877, when, under the stimulus of congenial fellowship, his old love again took possession of him. Since then he has been one of our most zealous and most prolific etchers.

Among the best known of Mr. Farrer's early works were a series of eleven plates illustrative of "Old New York,"—homesteads, churches, etc. of days gone by, that have either been already destroyed, or are doomed soon to perish. Interesting, however, as these plates are from an historical point of view, they no longer satisfy the artist's own demands, and he has therefore decided to withdraw them from publication. The following list comprises the most important and most interesting plates executed by Mr. Farrer during the last three years:—

- Old Oak Tree, Twilight.* 1872, retouched in 1877.—Size of engraved surface, breadth $4\frac{5}{8}$ " ; height $2\frac{5}{8}$ ".
Chickens. Signed, H. Farrer 1877.—B. $4\frac{3}{4}$ " ; h. $2\frac{7}{8}$ ".
The Washerwoman. Signed, H. Farrer 1877.—B. $3\frac{7}{8}$ " ; h. $4\frac{3}{8}$ ".
A Cloudy Day. Signed, H. Farrer 1877.—B. 5" ; h. $3\frac{1}{4}$ ".
A November Day. Signed, H. Farrer 1877.—B. 3" ; h. $4\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Twilight on the Creek. Signed, H. Farrer 1877.—B. $5\frac{3}{8}$ " ; h. $3\frac{3}{8}$ ".
December. Signed, H. Farrer 1877.—B. $6\frac{3}{4}$ " ; h. $4\frac{5}{8}$ ". Published in this number of the REVIEW.
Sunset, Coast of Maine. Signed, H. Farrer 1878.—B. $6\frac{3}{8}$ " ; h. $3\frac{1}{8}$ ".
Winter in the Woods. Signed, H. Farrer 1878.—B. 5" ; h. $3\frac{1}{4}$ ".
Old House by the Roadside. 1878.—B. 7" ; h. $4\frac{3}{8}$ ".
On the Marshes. 1878.—B. $6\frac{3}{8}$ " ; h. $4\frac{1}{8}$ ".
Twilight. 1878.—B. $6\frac{3}{8}$ " ; h. $4\frac{3}{8}$ ".
October. 1878.—B. $10\frac{1}{8}$ " ; h. $6\frac{5}{8}$ ".
Sunset. 1878.—B. $11\frac{3}{8}$ " ; h. 7".
Sunset, New York Bay. 1878.—B. $4\frac{1}{8}$ " ; h. $2\frac{1}{8}$ ".
Winter. Signed, H. Farrer 1879.—B. $4\frac{1}{8}$ " ; h. $2\frac{1}{8}$ ".
Staten Island Shore. 1879.—B. $4\frac{1}{8}$ " ; h. $2\frac{3}{4}$ ".
On New York Bay. Signed, H. Farrer 1879.—B. 7" ; h. $4\frac{1}{4}$ ".
Sandy Hook Light. Signed, H. Farrer 1879.—B. $6\frac{1}{8}$ " ; h. $4\frac{3}{8}$ ".
A Shady Spot on a Sunny Road. Signed, H. Farrer, 1879.—B. $4\frac{1}{8}$ " ; h. $5\frac{1}{4}$ ".
Van Sicklen's Landing, Coney Island. Signed, H. Farrer 1879.—B. $8\frac{5}{8}$ " ; h. $4\frac{5}{8}$ ". No margin.

Sunset on the East River. Signed, H. Farrer 1879. — B. $7\frac{1}{8}$ " ; h. $4\frac{1}{8}$ ". No margin. (Plate owned by Messrs. Hermann Wunderlich & Co., of New York.)

On the Beach at Bay Ridge. 1879. — B. $7\frac{3}{8}$ " ; h. $5\frac{1}{8}$ ". No margin.

On the East River. 1879. — B. $8\frac{5}{8}$ " ; h. $4\frac{7}{8}$ ". No margin.

An inspection of these plates offers a curiously fascinating insight into Mr. Farrer's development as an etcher. The first one on the list, etched in 1872, but retouched in 1877, shows the tendency to high finish and over-elaboration which might perhaps be expected from an adherent of the pre-Raphaelite movement. This tendency is still apparent in some of the earlier work of the year 1877, so that, in spite of greater virility and strength, the plates then executed have something of the methodical character and orderliness which would tempt one to call them "engraver's etchings." This applies more especially to the two plates, *A Cloudy Day*, and *A November Day*, both of them very beautiful specimens of this style of working. In the little plates called *Chickens* and *The Washerwoman*, although they precede the two plates before named, the artist aspires to greater freedom of treatment, and strives to attain tone by a liberal use of the dry-point (without, however, availing himself of the effect that may be produced by *bur*), and by artificial printing. All the plates following the *November Day*, up to the exquisite little *Sunset, New York Bay*, 1878, belong to this class, with the exception of the one entitled *Winter in the Woods*, which is a premonition of what is to come. These etchings are specially interesting as efforts to render effects of air and light, the two elements upon which so much of the sentiment of the landscape depends. As a rule the problem has been solved successfully, although occasionally the contrasts of light and dark are somewhat harsh, and the attempt at freedom in the treatment has been the excuse here and there for the introduction of lines, which, if the strict truth is to be told, are really unmeaning. The fine *Sunset*, 1878, is the largest among Mr. Farrer's etchings in this style; the *December*, published in this number of the REVIEW, one of the most successful.

In most of the plates executed in 1879, the intentions foreshadowed in *Winter in the Woods*, and *Sunset, New York Bay*, are followed out. The dry-point, although still effectively used, steps into the background, and more reliance is placed on the etched line; the very marked use of artificial printing is also abandoned to a considerable extent. The first plates of this last period are indeed treated so simply that they might almost be called dry. But the defect is rapidly overcome, and the three plates last named on the list are as exquisite as anything Mr. Farrer has ever done. In a future number of the REVIEW a specimen of this at present latest phase of the etcher will be given.

If the fact that Mr. Farrer came to America when he stood already on the threshold of manhood might perhaps be urged against his claim to be considered an *American* etcher, it may, on the other hand, be advanced in defence of this claim, that in his art he is thoroughly loyal to his adopted country, and that nothing in it betrays the foreigner. We have seen that some of his earliest efforts in etching were dedicated to the perpetuation of the scenes of old New York. After having for some time roamed in field and forest, he has lately turned his attention to the harbor of New York, a mine of artistic subjects than which a richer can nowhere be found. Whosoever has come up the Sound on a steamer, and has been up early enough to watch the rising sun, or has crossed one of the ferries from New Jersey at about the same time, or has sat on the deck of the boat to Boston, as she left her dock in the evening, rounded Castle Garden, and steamed up the East River, while all the shipping along both sides was enveloped in a golden haze, and the sky overhead was a very aureole of glory, must have regretted that so many of our artists have been blind all their lives to the beauty lying at their door. To those who have seen and understood this beauty, Mr. Farrer's *Sunset on the East River* will be a source of pure delight.

S. R. KOEHLER.